

ALDEN FAMILY

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Capt. Judah Alden by Gershom Bradford



We of Duxbury have always taken pride in the fact that some of the land farmed by John Alden has been uninterruptedly in the possession of the Alden family. However, we could not look ahead to a notable art center on the old Alden farm. Yet, through the public spiritedness of Carl Weyerhaeuser this is a fact.

This patron of historic preservation has restored the commodious "square-rigged" house at the corner of Tremont and Alden Streets. It was the home of Major Judah Alden and his daughter Mary Ann. He was one of Duxbury's distinguished soldiers of the Revolution.

He was born on the John Alden Farm on Oct. 3, 1750, the son of Colonel Briggs Alden. As early as 1773 he was a member of Ichabod Alden's company of minutemen, and, at the muster of Captain George Partridge's company in April 1775, Judah Alden was an officer. Almost immediately he was commissioned an ensign in the regiment of Colonel Theophilus Cotton, and in July of the same year and with the same regiment, he became second lieutenant in Samuel Bradford's company. Transferring to Bailey's second regiment, he was appointed a lieutenant and in 1776 a captain.

Our available sources do not show the engagements in which Captain Judah was involved. However, Bailey's Second Massachusetts Regiment, to which he was attached, was in the early campaign around New York; at the battle of Trenton at Christmas 1776; Princeton; the campaign that brought about the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga, October 1777; and Monmouth in June 1778.

At the end of the war he was brevetted a major, a special honor for meritorious service. It is recorded that he was of "great physical strength, was a skillful, brave, and prudent officer."

Shortly after leaving the army Major Alden established himself as a "trader" and for many years maintained a store in his home, but was deeply involved in civic affairs, repeatedly serving as Duxbury's representative. From 1829 until his death in 1845 he served as president of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati.

The stock of his store really entitled it to be called a general store. Note what Captain Bradford bought in February 1816: A gallon of molasses, 75¢. (This item appeared often.) On the third the order was a teapot, a coffee pot, 1/4 pound of ginger, a pair of hooks and eyes, another coffeepot (one for a shilling ten pence, the other 7 1/2 pence), needles and one yard of cotton; these articles cost 98¢.

Later in the month there was the purchase of 7 pounds of sugar and a broom for \$1.72 - the sugar at 18¢ a pound ran this item up, but a pair of children's shoes cost 67¢. On April 15 a pitcher was bought for 15¢ and the next day another pitcher for the same price. One can assume that the Captain's women folks so liked the pitcher that he was sent back for another. Six sheets of paper 6¢ - this sheet cost 1¢. Some unfamiliar purchases were a yard of copperplate 29¢, cream of tartar, potato starch and quills. The height of diversity in this bill was the hire of a horse and chaise for 37 1/2¢.

At last his shelves were cleared. His customers missed the quaint friendly inquiries concerning the use they had made of their purchases. The Deity was generous with the Major allotting him 95 years of life, which he employed usefully and in many ways.

The Major's daughter, Mary Ann, inherited some of her father's martial spirit. She walked, or better, she marched with a heavy tread fittingly in accord with her independence of character. In her youth her father provided her with lessons in Latin. What effect this may have had on her speech is not known, but her reputation for wit was fully established and few there were to challenge her. She attired herself in eccentric costumes of daring colors that astonished the staid ladies in quiet grays and black. In this way flouting the conventions of Duxbury of that day places her some five generations ahead of her time.